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ABSTRACT

Educational change is too complex and important ever to be delegated entirely to federal agencies and to federally-funded R&D centers and regional laboratories. Alternative agencies can and do play a part in the larger scheme of research, development, dissemination, diffusion, and adoption of innovations in education. One such agency is the school study-development council, a group of local school systems working voluntarily in loose confederation for the purpose of solving defined educational problems that exist in the member schools. Their three most important activities are inservice training, cooperative research, and the sharing of information. Councils have had their greatest success in the dissemination of educational innovations, in making the school client system aware of and interested in new ideas, thus helping them through the first two stages toward the actual adoption of innovations. (Author/WM)

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THE VIABILITY OF THE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL: A VOLUNTARY EDUCATIONAL CHANGE AGENCY

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6.05 ALTERNATIVE KNOWLEDGE AND UTILIZATION STRATEGIES

(Symposium, SIG/Research Utilization)

AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

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The Elusive Change Agency in Education

Finally it is revealed, the shifting sands of educational change are controlled by the direction of the wind from Washington, or so it might seem if you read the December issue of Education Researcher (4,11), the inhouse publication of the American Educational Research Association. In that issue the future of the R & D Centers and the Regional Labs is portrayed rather starkly and the burden of uncertainty for the future of research, development, dissemination, diffusion, and adoption is unceremoniously shifted to the lap of the National Institute for Education.

The assumption is that N.I.E will now control the winds of change, not only the direction, but the velocity, force, turbulence, humidity, etc., all with success of course. If we in education were naive in our previous assumption that federally-funded R & D Centers and Regional Labs could do the job, are we also naive in our expectations for N.I.E.?

Educationists, if they are guilty of anything, are probably most deceived by the "grand theory" or "master plan" syndrome, the pervasive, but inexplicable mind set that a single solution can always be found for a complex problem.

The thesis projected in this paper is that alternative agencies can and do play a part in the larger scheme of research, development, dissemination, diffusion, and adoption of innovations in education; and furthermore, that educational change is too complex and important to ever be delegated entirely to federal agencies.

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This paper deals with a specific type of education agency, the school study-development council. To better understand the nature of this unique type of organization, it might help to discuss the generic family of which it is a part, that is, the larger set of voluntary educational cooperatives. In 1971, Dr. Larry W. Hughes and Dr. C.M. Achilles (8) completed the final report of a USOE funded study relative to educational cooperatives. That report, entitled Interpretative Study of Research and Development Relative to Educational Cooperatives, stands as the most complete study of its kind to date. The Hughes-Achilles study attempted a definition of an educational cooperative or consortia. They, like others, found it difficult to define. What they derived instead was a number of general statements about the concept. They indicate that an educational cooperative is much like a consumer's cooperative. That is, it is started by the client system rather than mandated from above. They go on to state: (8:4-5)

> An educational cooperative is a joint effort of two or more educational organizations which has as its purpose change and innovation in education, and to enlarge the scope, quality and assessability of programs and services in education. An educational cooperative is built upon an exchange system; it is a voluntary, mutually rewarding system. An educational cooperative allows each of its units to remain independent, is permissive in its operation, works toward comprehensive change, provides a cost-effectiveness ratio somewhat lower than an individual unit would have if it were working alone, and is primarily interested in developmental aspects of education and programs. In a voluntary educational cooperative, employees are not full-time members of a standard political unit, such as the local school unit. One goal of a cooperative is to provide clients access to certain features of quality education through the pooling and extending of resources. An educational cooperative is generally thought of

> as a system within a defined region, containing a number of contiguious (although notnecessarily so) independent school districts which develop and share educational resources through the use of such things as communications media, mobile facilities, joint research and development activities, and computer and data processing technology. The educational cooperative and multidistrict confederation provides the conceptual and organizational framework for local school systems to increase their capabilities to produce quality education.... (It) provides structure for the joint solution of interdistrict and interstate educational problems. It also promotes wide-spread dialogue among professional educators and the wider intellectual community. The educational cooperative is a confederation of autonomous school systems whereby each retains local control.... (and) is not merely a service center or service unit. It is a process which integrates cooperating schools as its components. It is not a consolidation of a few school districts, but a creation of them.

Within this explanation of a cooperative lies the school study-development council, which can best be defined as a group of local school systems working together usually (but not necessarily) under the sponsorship of an institution of higher education with the purpose of solving defined educational problems that exist in the member schools. It is typically a loose confederation with totally voluntary membership. The first formal council was formed in 1942 under the direction of Paul Mort, Teachers College, Columbia University. Initially composed of twenty-eight school systems in the metropolitan New York area, it was and is yet called The Metropolitan School Study Council. Since 1942 the number of school/development councils has grown to eighty-one. Fifty-one percent are a product of the decade of the 60's and ten have been formed in the 70's. Some councils encompass large georgraphical areas; others are quite small, for example, the Associated Public School System includes public school systems across the entire nation, whereas the Western New York School Study Council has members in one region of New York state. The New England School Development Council has member schools

in the six New England states. The Tri-State School Study Council has member systems from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia, whereas the Public Schools for Cooperative Research Council includes only certain schools in the eastern portion of Tennessee. School study councils also vary in size. The largest regional study council, the New England School Development Council, reports a membership of 249 public school systems. The smallest, the Fox Valley School Study Council, reported thirteen public school systems on its membership roster. More than one-half of the school study/development councils serve a combination of school districts with a student population in excess of 150,000 students. Less than fifteen percent of the councils serve school districts making up a total student population of less than 30,000.

The multicounty region is the most frequently reported service area. Danenburg (3) stated that more than one-half of the councils in his study reported several counties as the geographic area served. One-fourth of the councils reported serving one state and a very small number of councils (3.9%) reported serving several states. A few councils mentioned single cities or suburban areas as their service district.

Distinguishing Characteristics of School Study/Development Councils

Organizational Structure

Councils are controlled in nearly all instances by governing boards or executive committees. The typical staff of a council is composed of an executive director, part-time consultants from a university, and other assistants. In most instances the executive director is employed part-time by the council and part-time by a sponsoring college or university.

Sponsoring Institutions

The typical council was initiated and sponsored by an institution of higher education. This relationship is one of mutual reward. Colleges and universities utilize the study development council as a vehicle for fulfilling a public service mission. And public school systems utilize the council as a linkage system to research and developmental activities.

Financial Resources

The principal source of income for councils has been through the assessed membership fees from member school districts and monies for incoming services from sponsoring institutions. Many councils also report state and federal sources of income.

Types of Populations Served

A mixed population area (urban-suburban-rural) is the typical setting for a council. More than one-third of all study councils fall into that classification as do the most "successful" ones, according to Babel's (1) study.

Activities of School Study/Development Councils

The three most important activities of study councils are inservice training, cooperative research and the sharing of information (3). In his study, Danenburg secured a listing of activities according to importance. Inservice education ranked first. Dissemination and developmental activity ranked second and third, respectively. Although councils generally are the sole sponsor of activities for member school districts, a unique strength of the councils has been their ability to cooperate in the co-sponsoring of many activities.

Even though the range of involvement of school/development councils includes research, development, dissemination and diffusion activities, recent studies indicate that the preponderance of activities lie within the dissemination realm. Dissemination activities are usually manifest in the form of programs that build awareness and/or inservice education programs that center on diffusing R & D packages. Councils disseminate ideas through meetings, workshops, published reports, conference proceedings, newsletters and journals. In Danenburg's study, councils perceived they were most effective in the areas of inservice education, dissemination and gathering information and least effective in research, diffusion and evaluation.

A Period of Uncertainty

Since the advent of state and federal aid to education, a number of people have prophesized the demise of study/development councils. Typical of these predictions was Brickell's early comment in Organizing New York State for Educational Change (2). In that 1961 publication, Brickell said:

> The councils seem to be one fragment of an answer to a large problem --- a fragment which tells much about what local school systems need from outside agencies, but a fragment which cannot meet those needs. In a statewide reorganization of the process of instructional change, it should be replaced with a more complete answer.

It is of interest to note that now, thirteen years later, most of the study councils that existed in New York state at the time of the Brickell statement continue to exist even though the public school systems in the state are being financially pressed into using the services of the regional BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) cooperatives.

It is of further interest to note that since Brickell made his statement (and after billions of dollars have been poured into states by the

federal government) fifty-six new study-development councils have emerged on the national scene.

Why Do They Persist?

Ultimately, the question must be raised, "What factors can possibly account for the continued existence and proliferation of study/development councils?" Unfortunately, conclusive research does not exist to answer that question and thus we can only deduce from existing studies and the literature on change and change agencies, possible clues that might provide an explanation. The following deductions are speculative. By comparison and inference, an explanatory set of factors will be projected.

Everett Rogers, in Diffusion of Innovations, (9) synthesizes pertinent multi-disciplinary studies to derive the concept that the adoption of an innovation takes place in stages. He postulates that the potential adopter of a new idea must in some way proceed through each of those stages before adoption finally takes place. The stages proposed are: awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and finally adoption. Both the Hughes-Achilles and the Danenburg studies suggest that councils have had their greatest sucess in making the school client system aware and interested in new ideas, thus helping them through the first two stages. Furthermore, they indicate that councils often provide a threat-free environment where new ideas can be evaluated and "tried out."

Rogers further generalizes that early adopters of innovations exhibit different kinds of communication behavior than late adopters. He indicates that the presence of impersonal sources, cosmopolitan sources, closer contacts, and more sources characterize earlier adopter's behavior. Studies of councils indicate these conditions are provided by the university personnel who are a part of the council consortium.

In a section on opinion leaders and the flow of ideas, Rogers promotes the concept of the interaction effect and stresses the importance of personal influence. Brickell spoke partially to this point when he said:

> The chief function of the councils has been to increase communication among member school systems by arranging meetings, publishing bulletins, organizing study committees of teachers and carrying out statistical studies. They have undoubtedly reduced the insularity of their members.

In many respects it appears that the university personnel in the council structure play the same role as the Cooperative Extension Agent does between the Experimental Station and the farm client system, although admittedly that role has not been formalized to any great extent.

In a more recent book, Communication of Innovations, Rogers makes another interesting and relevant point. In the section called, "Change Agency versus Client Orientation," he suggests the following generalization based on an analysis of research studies (10:237). "Generalization 7-2: Change agent success is positively related to his client orientation, rather than to change agency orientation." Although many education consortia (change agencies) utilize input from the client system, few formal agencies other than councils seem to exhibit the client system orientation implied in the above generalization. Councils, by their nature, locate the power for action within the client system. Although the change agent (executive secretary) may come from either the client system or the university, the governing boards are made up entirely of clients, hence client interests are paramount. Often other change agencies (or agents) appear to have little regard for the expressed needs of the client system, taking instead a rather missionary or paternalistic attitude toward them.

Somewhat more recently, Havelock and his associates in Planning for Innovation (7) derived a similar synthesis of research findings on the

dissemination and utilization of education innovations. Of particular interest is their identification of seven factors which seem to account for most dissemination and utilization phenomena. Utilizing their concept of: linkage, structure, openness, capacity, reward, proximity and synergy, one can construct a framework against which an educational organization dedicated to promoting "change" could be examined.

According to Hughes and Achilles, councils, although they report a wide range of programs, have been most successful in activities that lie within the dissemination realm. To what extent do councils provide for the factors enumerated above?

Linkage -- Linkage refers to the number, variety, and mutuality of resource system-user system contacts, the degree of interrelatedness and the collaborative relationships.

Taken at face value the previously mentioned studies of councils indicate that councils do exhibit behavior that serves the linkage function. With little difficulty one can easily insert councils in Havelock's Figure 7.4 on Pages 7-35 of Planning for Innovation. (7)

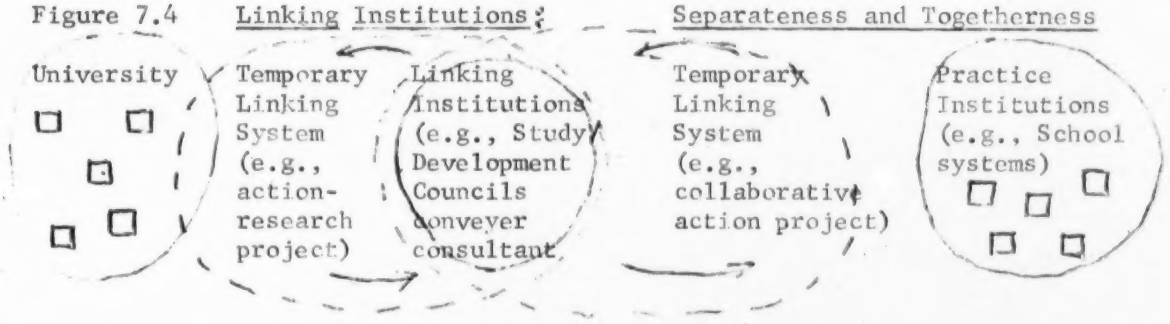


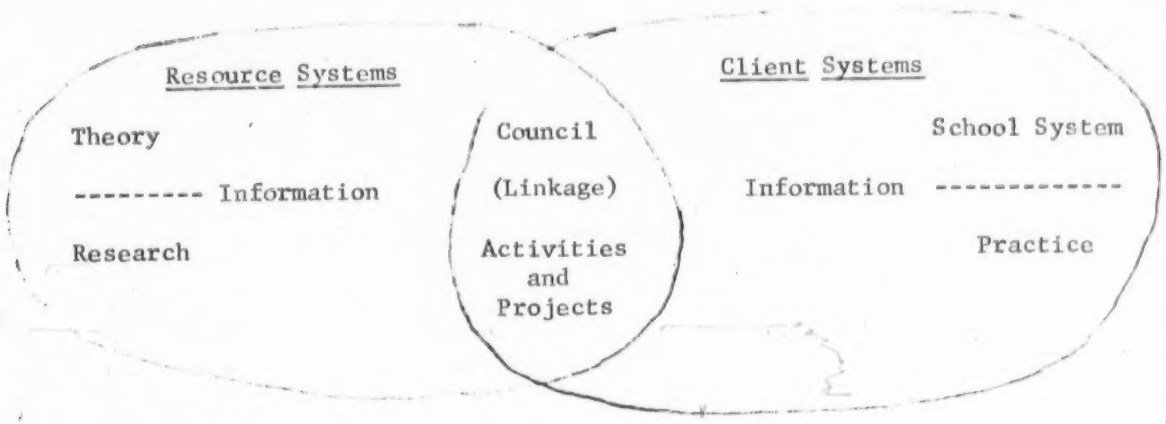
Figure 7.4
Linking Institutions
Separateness and Togetherness
University
Temporary Linking System (e.g., action-research project)
Linking Institutions (e.g., Study Development Councils conveyer consultant
Temporary Linking System (e.g., collaborative action project)
Practice Institutions (e.g., School systems)

Structure -- Structure refers to the degree of systematic organization and coordination that exists between the client and the resource system. Unfortunately, in education there are few organizations or agencies that can even remotely claim to perform this function. Even the Regional Laboratories and Centers seem to fall short when measured on "systematic organization and coordination."

An "if and then" proposition might be the only measure applicable for any organization at the present time.

If universities are viewed as viable education resource systems,

Then university-sponsored councils have attempted to provide a systematic organized structure for helping to process knowledge into practice through planned activities and projects.



(please bear in mind that councils do not claim to be the only education consortium that attempts to provide structure between a resource system and a client system, but they have been consciously making the attempt for a longer sustained period of time than most).

Openness -- Openness refers to readiness to give and receive new information. For councils openness is illustrated by both the formal and informal services it provides for its client system. For the public schools it is characterized by the continued expectation they have that their membership will provide rewarding new ideas, products and ways of doing things. Garber (6) in his study, found that the "sharing of information" was listed first among council activities.

Capacity -- Capacity refers to the ability to retrieve and marshall diverse resources. In addition to the resources available to school districts through council/university connections, many councils maintain working relationships with State Departments of Education, Regional Education Laboratories, Research and Development Centers, industry, and federal government as well as other councils. They are also served by their own National School Development Council, Inc., a voluntary non-profit education association that serves as a connecting link to many other resources.

Reward - Reward refers to the benefits derived by each member of a social system, through the interaction that takes place. That reward/reinforcement does take place in council activities is best attested to be school systems' willingness to invest in membership during the past thirty years. This record is even more remarkable when one considers that by and large the council relationships are devoid of monetary inducements.

Proximity -- Proximity refers to the closeness and ready access of resources and client systems to one another. Proximity refers not only to physical factors, but also to organizational linkage structures and to the perceived closeness and access that the system members feel.

Perhaps the size of councils, the similarity of their interests and their regional nature helps account for the proximity that exists; or it

may be the fact that so many activities take place out in the client system. A third possibility and one seldom present in other organizations, is the fact that councils have as their very reason for existing the solution of problems defined by the client system itself.

Synergy -- Like Havelock we have trouble with the concept of synergy because of the looseness of the fit of the term. However, quoting from his manuscript, (7:11-30):

> Successful utilization usually seems to require persistent leadership in the resource system. There must be some nuclear group pulling together diverse resources, structuring them and developing and executing strategies for their effective dissemination and utilization, and doing so on a continuing basis -- -- the user can hardly ever be induced to adopt an innovation on the basis of one message from one source at one time. He almost always needs repeated inputs in a variety of media over an extended time from a variety of sources before he will become an adopter.

The studies of councils previously mentioned all take note of the variety of medium, messages and utilized channels that bear some relationship to the synergistic concept as stated above. Meetings, workshops, newsletters, journals, study groups, research reports, conference proceedings, project groups etc. are the traditional forte of the councils.

Havelock goes on to say, (7:11-31):

> The seven factors listed above seem to account for the bulk of D & U phenomena studied to date, but there are many other important variables, which perhaps deserve to be rated as 'factors' also. A few of these which come immediately to mind are 'FAMILIARITY,' 'PRIMACY,' 'STATUS' and 'VALUE LOADING.'

In terms of change agency organizations, perhaps none is more familiar to the school systems of this country than the councils. A thirty-year history of councils virtually assures the accuracy of that statement. Furthermore, the fact that many administrators have had actual contact with the organization at the university in which they received their training also serves to familiarize them with the concept.

If primacy or "being first" does seem to have inordinate weight in human affairs as suggested, councils as opposed to more recent education organizations may have another built-in advantage.

Status -- as Havelock points out, may be a factor, but it seems also to be an ambivalent one. Just as "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" so perhaps is status. At the very least it seems to be situational.

Value -- Finally, in regard to value, Havelock states:

> Values are the basic stop-and-go signals for human behavior. They presumably lay down the patterns or limits within which people feel free to send and receive knowledge. This suggests that messages which clearly contradict pre-existing values will not get anywhere, and those which are appealing to them will get far. It also suggests that a perception of shared values will bring resource and user systems together and the perceptions of disparate values will drive them apart. Even the medium may have some value loading (as when we reject new ideas because someone has tried to order to legislate their adoption.)

Perhaps one of the most distinguishing characteristics of councils is the common value system that they all appear to share. It is best summed up by Mort's original declaration of intent for councils that by "pooling and sharing" school districts and universities could best solve educational problems.

To the above we could add credibility as a factor. Rogers (10:244) states, "credibility is the degree to which a communication source or channel is perceived as trustworthy and competent by the receiver." Again, although the data is deductive, a survey conducted by the National School Development Council, Inc. in 1969 indicated that thirty-three of eighty-one councils served a total of 1,207 school districts composed of 340,802 professional staff teaching 6,680,695 students. It is significant that each of these school districts demonstrates its continuing faith in councils each year by paying membership dues.

POST SCRIPT

Drucker (5:364) in The Age of Discontinuity, when discussing the politics of knowledge states:

> Diversity, flexibility, and competition will become more important in respect to knowledge, the more knowledge becomes basic to society. This will also raise major political decisions on knowledge and will make it increasingly necessary to have alternatives of knowledge policy.
>
> In the past, knowledge required little money. Today it requires more and more. In fact, it requires so much that only government can supply it. This immediately raises the question of government dictation and thought control. In the United States, government today supports about two-thirds of all research work. In the rest of the free world the proportion is not much less, though the total amounts are. And, of course, in the communist countries, government supports all research. But can we expect government to pay the piper without calling the tune? And is government control of the acquisition of knowledge compatible with a free society? Is it even in the best interest of knowledge?

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EPILOGUE

I realize that for the typical "researcher" the inferences set forth in the preceding section will not be viewed as "compelling evidence," nor must they be. In an era where performance is the byword, the epilogue is important. Today a number of councils around the country are engaged in one of the most unique consortium experiences involving one of the most complex educational innovations conceived to date. Local councils, their national organization (NSDC), The General Learning Corporation (a private education industry) and The Center for Advanced Study of Educational Administration (CASEA) have embarked on a joint effort to research, develop, disseminate, diffuse and install a version of P.P.B.S. in member school districts. The innovation called SPECS (School, Planning, Evaluation, Communication System) will provide yet another test of the viability of councils. Lest the reader assume this consortium could be caught in the same trap as the labs and centers, let me hasten to say such will not be the case, for in the final analysis it will be the council's client system, as always, that will accept or reject the innovation, not a panel of USOE evaluators.

Paul Mort is well remembered for his contention that it is the adaptable school districts that are on the cutting edge; for thirty years that has been the byword and forte of the councils and little evidence has accumulated to prove the councils wrong.